

Minerals Management Service

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Your Federal Partners: Working Together for Offshore Safety

When tropical storms and hurricanes pass through the oil and gas producing Federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico, several Federal agencies play roles in preparing for and responding to potential damage.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), is the federal agency charged with providing storm forecasts and warnings to the American public to protect lives and livelihoods, ensure continuity of safe navigation, and support recovery from storm impacts.

NOAA also plays a critical role in response and recovery including sonar surveys of the seafloor to detect new obstructions from wreckage, shoaling, and other dangers to navigation so ports can be reopened; overflights to assess damage from erosion; assessment of the environmental impacts of any hazardous material spills caused by the storm; and development of long-term environmental recovery plans.

As a storm approaches, the Minerals Management Service (MMS), U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) and Department of Energy (DOE) also work cooperatively to minimize potential damage to oil and gas infrastructure, prevent injury to industry workers, and respond quickly after the storm has passed.

This collaboration among MMS, USCG, and DOE occurs in stages:

Monitoring Stage

- MMS closely monitors the progression of the approaching tropical system from information provided by NOAA and verifies all pertinent points of contact within the USCG and DOE.
- MMS provides up-to-date information on the location of manned platforms and drilling rigs to the USCG in advance of the tropical system entering the Gulf.


Decision Stage

- The MMS Gulf of Mexico Regional Director and staff decide whether or not to activate the Continuity of Operations (COOP) team.
- If the COOP is activated, the MMS notifies the USCG and DOE along with all of the operators in the Gulf, posts an activation announcement on the MMS website, and may issue a Notice to Lessees.

Activation Stage

- Depending on the storm track, MMS COOP members and the USCG representative travel to Houston (or another remote location) or remain in New Orleans.



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- Both agencies closely monitor the evacuation of offshore personnel from rigs and platforms.
 - MMS begins monitoring curtailed production of oil and natural gas from the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS).

Reporting Stage

- MMS issues daily news releases to the public on personnel evacuations and production curtailment.
- MMS briefs the Department of the Interior, DOE, and USCG on early assessments.
- When it is safe to do so, MMS coordinates overflights in accordance with the path of the storm.
- MMS shares information with the USCG to reduce amount of flight time and maximize information gathered.

Post-Monitoring Stage

- MMS releases preliminary damage assessment numbers.

- MMS releases Notice to Lessees informing them of inspections required of facilities and pipelines.
- MMS may grant acceptable departures from normal regulations to allow for the quick return of environmentally safe oil and natural gas production.
- MMS continues to monitor and report production statistics. MMS also submits after-action reports, summaries, and recovery statistics.

MMS manages offshore oil and gas exploration as well as renewable energy sources including wind, wave, solar, and underwater current, on 1.76 billion acres of the Outer Continental Shelf while protecting the human, marine, and coastal environments. MMS also collects, accounts for, and disburses mineral revenues from Federal and American Indian lands.

For more information, visit MMS at www.mms.gov, USCG at www.coastguard.gov, DOE at www.doe.gov and NOAA at www.noaa.gov.

Energy – MMS – Value